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ABSTRACT

This paper details the content of a one-term course designed to introduce advanced students of English as a second language to the general cultural environment of the United States, especially the university, and to provide them with some intercultural communication skills and awarenesses. Focus is placed on students' needs assessment, the selection of a university, notetaking, testing, United States classroom behavior patterns, student-professor relationships, nonverbal communication, and the cultural dimension of dating, family, and friendship. A variety of communication sources and styles is stressed to optimize student involvement and learning in class interaction. The results of course evaluation forms submitted to students in the program reveal that as a result of their exposure to the program, students believe themselves to be better informed and therefore better able to cope with their new cultural surroundings. (Author/JK)

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ORIENTATION AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A COURSE FOR ADVANCED ESL STUDENTS

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A paper prepared for presentation at the thirty-third annual conference of the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, May 26-29, 1981, Nashville, Tennessee.

It is a statement of the obvious to say that students in an intensive English language program have as their primary goal the learning of English. That is, they want mastery of the language to the extent that a particular score on the TOEFL can be achieved. What is not such an obvious need, but one which most students begin to recognize as they approach possible matriculation in a United States university, is that they should know more about and have skills to manage themselves in both American academia and in the larger context of United States culture.

It is to provide some of this information and these skills that the Englisn Language and Orientation Program at Louisiana State University offers its course in United States orientation for upper level students. This is incorporated into the regular spoken English offering, a course which has both a pronunciation and a conversation component. The skills of oral/aural communication are exercised through a variety of activities designed to orient students to the general cultural environment of the United States, especially the university, and to provide opportunities for developing intercultural communication skills and awarenesses. What follows details the content of this course.

General Considerations

In facilitating cultural orientation we must deal with the cognitive, emotional and behavioral facets of perception and response. To accommodate this broad a range, a diversity of

activities is planned which runs from reasoned verbal input to graphic or pictorial displays to experiential exercises. Additionally, care is taken during the fourteen-week term to expose students to a variety of communication sources and styles.

Cultural adaptation is predicated to some extent on the ability to communicate with persons of another culture. And this ability to communicate interculturally is facilitated by the maintaining of a non-judgmental attitude toward the "peculiarities" of another's mode of viewing and handling the world. Basic to the operation of the cultural orientation class, then, is the practicing of a non-judgmental attitude/behavior. Students are encouraged to express their views and to tolerate the views of others. Given fourteen to sixteen students from eight to ten different cultures there is always opportunity for different opinions and for exercise of the concomitant tolerance.

Specific Considerations

Grade pressure is greatly lessened and class participation encouraged by a policy of grading principally on participation and class attendance.

Class activities listed below are only somewhat sequential and proportion among items listed below is determined by results of the need assessment done during the first class meeting.

No attempt is made to isolate academic from cultural orientation since they are to some degree mutually inclusive in reality.

Texts:

Pifer, G. & N. Mutoh. Points of View. Rowley, Mass.:Newbury House. 1977.

Prator, C. & B. Robinett. Manual of American English Pronunciation. (Third edition) New York:Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 1972.

Class Sessions

1. Needs Inventory completion (see attached) and individual student introductions.

2. Anecdotal, cursory introduction to the U.S. with "U.S. Culturgram," focus on: diet; eating habits; greetings; topics of conversation.

3. Lecture/discussion of culture shock and perception. (Adler; Bennett; Oberg)

4. The U.S. value system as illustrated by proverbs. (Condon & Yousef; Kohls)

5. Studying a foreign language--problems, motivations and uses. Reading with discussion. (Pifer & Muton, Chapt. 2)

6. Guest lecturer from sociology department re American society in general and American academia in particular--what to expect, how to cope.

7. Advanced education: motivattions and rewards. Reading with discussion. (Pifer & Muton, Chapt. 4)

8. Reports on out-of-class observations of regular university lecture class.

9. "Using the telephone"--Brief lecture for information and note-taking exercise. Quiz with immediate feedback.

10. Guest lecturer, English Program Counselor re getting information about and applying to U.S. schools. Question and answer session following.

11. Getting involved, i.e. To what extent is one one's "brother's keeper?" Reading and discussion. (Pifer & Mutoh, Chapt. 11)

12. Critical incidents of cultural contrast. Reading and discussion. (Gosnell)

13. Film, "Duet" with discussion re problems/opportunities of advanced technology in traditional societies.

14. A friend in need of help--dillema. (Pifer & Mutoh, Chapt. 12)

15. Friendship and self-disclosure. Individual written exercise followed by small group discussion re cultural differences and friendship with same sex and opposite sex friends. (Bennett & Bennett)

16. Friendship roleplays--videotaped with immediate replay and discussion. (Paulston)

17. Guest panel of American and international university students. Topic: Experiences in American academic and social life. Question and answer session.

18. Nonverbal communication--Introductory lecture with experiential exercise. (Hall; Culturgram; Saltzman)

19. Individual reports of out-of-class observation of nonverbal communication.

20. Film, "Women's Liberation" with discussion of male/female roles.

21. Getting married. Reading and discussion. (Pifer & Mutoh Chapt. 1)

22. The working wife. Reading and discussion. (Pifer & Mutoh, Chapt. 14)

23. Family togetherness. Reading and discussion. (Pifer & Mutoh, Chapt. 8.)

24. Family problems roleplays--videotaped with immediate replay.

25. What to do about grandmother. Reading and discussion re attitudes toward elderly in family. (Pifer & Mutoh, Chapt. 9)

26. Film, "Leo Beuerman" with discussion re attitudes toward handicapped. (see "References")

27. Final individual student interview--private ten-minute talk primarily for pronunciation evaluation, also to discuss the course in general.

28. Final written evaluation--ungraded written feedback for instructor's information.

Summary

Based on tallies of three different classes' final evaluations it can be said that they generally found the course very informative. Specifically: Outside speakers were rated with a mean of 4.2 on a 5-point scale. The most valuable class activities in descending order were those focusing on: family; the"U.S. Culturgram"; male/female roles; nonverbal communication; videotaping; culture shock and the film "Leo Beuerman,"--all had mean ratings of 3.2 or more on a 4-point scale. Generally speaking, students found little that should be eliminated from the course, some even suggested expansion of certain facets, e.g. class discussion, information re culture shock.

The goal in offering a couse of this type is to assist students in making tne adjustment to the United States, its educatinnal institutions, in particular. As yet we can't objectively state that we nave accomplished this. It may never be possible given the subjective nature of cultural adjustment. However, we can say tnat, as a result of exposure to tne offerings detailed previously, students believe themselves to be better informed about and therefore better able to cope with the culture in which they are currently living.

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Women's Liberation. Ann Arbor, Mich:Xerox Films. (Film)

SPOKEN ENGLISH/ORIENTATION
Levels 5,6

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Name:_____
Country:_____
Plans after English language study: Check appropriate response.
Immediate return to home country ___
Study in U.S. university as
undergraduate ___
graduate ___
Other:

I. Please check your answer to the following:

	yes	no
1. I have made a telephone call to my country with help of the operator.	___	___
2. I have made a telephone call to my country without help of the operator.	___	___
3. I have made a telephone call to another part of the U.S. with help of the operator.	___	___
4. I have made a telephone call to another part of the U.S. without help of the operator.	___	___

II. After the following statements, please check the appropriate columns to indicate your responses. (Here "American" refers to "in the U.S.")

	I have not done before	I have done or know about already	I would like to know more about	I think this is very important to know about.
1. Living in a dormitory.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
2. Getting information about U.S. universities.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
3. Applying for admission to a U.S. university.	.....	.....	.....	.....
4. Studying at a U.S. university (lectures, tests, etc.).....	.....	.....	.....	.....
5. Using a university library.	.....	.....	.....	.....
6. Finding recreational opportunities (sports, games, music, etc.) at the university (LSU, for example)	.....	.....	.....	.....
7. Finding recreational opportunities outside the university	.....	.....	.....	.....
8. Finding places to shop in the city	.....	.....	.....	.....
9. Meeting Americans of the same sex	.....	.....	.....	.....
10. Meeting Americans of the other sex	.....	.....	.....	.....
11. Visiting in an American home	.....	.....	.....	.....

III. Please briefly list other areas/items which you would like to know to make studying and living here easier and more pleasant.

1.
2.